Limits to the Cas A ^{44}Ti Line Flux and Constraints on the Ejecta Energy and the Compact Source

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ABSTRACT

Two long observations of Cas A supernova remnant were made by the *Rossi X-ray Timing Explorer* in 1996 and 1997 to search for hard X-ray line emission at 67.9 and 78.4 keV from decay of ^{44}Ti formed during the supernova event. Continuum flux was detected up to 100 keV, but the ^{44}Ti lines were not detected. The 90% confidence upper limit to the line flux is 3.6×10^{-5} photons cm^{-2}s^{-1}. This is consistent with the recent *BeppoSAX* detection and with the *CGRO*/COMPTEL detection of the companion transition line flux for ^{44}Sc decay. The mean *BeppoSAX*—COMPTEL flux indicates that $1.5\pm0.3\ \times10^{-4}$M$_\odot$ of ^{44}Ti was produced in the supernova explosion. Based upon recent theoretical calculations, and optical observations suggesting a WN Wolf-Rayet progenitor with an initial mass of $\geq$25 M$_\odot$, the observed ^{44}Ti yield implies that the Cas A supernova ejecta energy was $\sim2\times10^{51}$ ergs, and as a result a neutron star was formed, rather than a black hole. We suggest Cas A is possibly in the early stages of the AXP/SGR scenario in which the push-back disk has yet to form, and when the disk does form, the accretion will increase the luminosity to that of present-day AXP/SGRs and pulsed emission will commence.

Subject headings: nuclear reactions, nucleosynthesis, abundances — supernova remnants — X-rays: individual (Cassiopeia A)

1. Introduction

Optical observations suggest that Cas A is the remnant of a Type Ib/c or Type II supernova whose progenitor was a WN Wolf-Rayet star with initial mass greater than 25 M$_\odot$ (Fesen & Becker 1991; Jansen et al. 1988). The discovery of a point source at the center of the remnant by *Chandra* (Tananbaum 1999) is strongly indicative of the creation of a neutron star or black hole in the event, and would be consistent with such a progenitor.

Subsequent observations by *Chandra* (Chakrabarty et al. 2001; Murray et al. 2001) and *XMM* (Mereghetti, Tiengo, & Israel 2001) have confirmed the point source nature of the object, but the existence of pulsations (and therefore a neutron star) is still questionable. Comparison of supernova explosion models (Woosley & Weaver 1995; Nakamura et al. 2001) with measurements of the amount of ^{44}Ti created, can be used to estimate the remnant core mass and, therefore, the nature of the compact object.

^{44}Ti is produced by explosive Si burning and the freeze out from nuclear statistical equilibrium in supernovae, and is believed to be the primary source of ^{44}Ca (Timmes et al. 1996). ^{44}Ti decays with a 59.2$\pm$0.6 year half-life (Ahmad et al. 1998; Görres et al. 1998; Norman et al. 1998) to ^{44}Sc producing two nuclear lines at 67.9 and 78.4 keV of essentially equal intensity. The ^{44}Sc decays to ^{44}Ca with a 2.5 day half-life by emitting a gamma-ray of 1157 keV. All three nuclear lines are expected to have essentially the same line strength. Given the half-life of ^{44}Ti, the distance to Cas A (3.4 kpc; Reed et al. (1995)), the time since the supernova (317 yr for a mean observation date of 1997; Ashworth (1980)), and the observed line flux, one can estimate the amount of ^{44}Ti created.

Attempts to detect the ^{44}Ti lines began with the analysis of galactic scanning observations by the germanium spectrometer on *HEAO-3* (Mahoney et al. 1992). A 1σ limit of 8.3×10^{-5}photons cm^{-2}s^{-1} from a point source anywhere in the galaxy was determined for the ^{44}Ti line flux. Initial results from *CGRO*/COMPTEL observations of Cas A announced the discovery of 1.157 MeV line flux from the ^{44}Sc decay (Iyudin et al. 1994), and this was revised after further observations to be $3.3\pm0.6\times10^{-5}$photons cm^{-2}s^{-1} (Iyudin 1999). *CGRO*/OSSE observations of Cas A provided for a simultaneous fit to the three nuclear lines, and yielded a 99% confidence upper limit of 5.1×10^{-5}photons cm^{-2}s^{-1} (The et al. 1995), with detection of the continuum radiation to 40 keV (The et al. 1996). With the launches of *RXTE* and *BeppoSAX* in 1995 and 1996, two powerful hard X-ray instruments became available for ^{44}Ti line searches. The initial *RXTE*/HEXTE result was a 2.4σ detection ($4.3\pm1.8\times10^{-5}$photons cm^{-2}s^{-1}) during one long observation and no detection ($-1.4\pm1.7\times10^{-5}$ photons cm^{-2}s^{-1}) in another (Rothschild et al. 1998). Similarly, initial *BeppoSAX*/PDS measurements could only claim an upper limit ($\leq5\times10^{-5}$photons cm^{-2}s^{-1}; Vink (1998)). After additional observations, Vink et al. (2001) were finally able to claim a good detection with a flux of $2.1\pm0.7\times10^{-5}$photons cm^{-2}s^{-1} for the 68 and 78 keV lines from ^{44}Ti. In this article we present a reanalysis of the *RXTE*/HEXTE observations of Cas A that were begun before the Vink et al. (2001) announcement of the detection.

2. Observations

RXTE observed Cas A several times for calibration purposes (ObsIds 00022, 10418, 30804, and 40806) and twice as part of an investigation into the ^{44}Ti emission lines (ObsId 10271 and 20253). The broad-band (2-60 keV) spectral results have been published by Allen et al. (1997), and this analysis concentrates on the 15-240 keV data from the High Energy X-ray Timing Experiment (HEXTE; Rothschild et al. (1998)). The HEXTE is a set of eight NaI(Tl)/CsI(Na) scintillation detectors grouped into two clusters of four detectors each. The HEXTE detectors are mechanically collimated to a 1° FWHM field of view, and cover the 15-250 keV range. The full collecting area for HEXTE is 1400 cm^2 (spectral capability was lost from one HEXTE detector early in the mission).

The observation dates and accumulated livetimes are given in Table 1. Since the livetime associated with the calibration observations is quite small compared to that of the two long observations, the analysis presented here will be restricted to the latter set of data.

3. Data Reduction and Analysis

The HEXTE data were accumulated for each cluster using a script developed at UCSD and the University of Tübingen. The cluster data were separated into on-source, off-source-plus and off-source-minus, since each HEXTE cluster collects real-time background data from two independent positions ±1.5° to either side of the on-source position. The two clusters' rotation axes are orthogonal to each other, and in this way four independent background regions are sampled. By comparing the two off-source positions for a given cluster, one can determine if a confusing source is contaminating one of the background regions, and if so, eliminate it from further analysis. For the case of the Cas A observations, no confusing sources were detected. The background observations are 75% as long as the on-source observations, since the time to move the pointing position on- and off-source comes out of the background observations. This ensures HEXTE continual on-source coverage.

Separate good time intervals were calculated for the three pointing positions of each cluster. The good time intervals required the pointing direction to be within 0.01° of the center of the Cas A remnant, its elevation above the Earth's horizon to be greater than 10°, and the time since the start of the most recent South Atlantic Anomaly passage to be greater than 20 minutes.

For each individual observation (17 each within ObsIds 10271 and 20253), the plus and minus off-source data sets were combined to form the background data set for each cluster, and the individual source/background data for each ObsId were summed for each cluster.

Finally, the ObsId 10271 and 20253 cluster A and B data were summed to form a single on-source and single off-source spectral accumulation. The resulting pulse height histogram from the two 200 ks observations contains 226 ks livetime on-source and 170 ks of real-time background. Subsequent spectral fitting was performed using these two files, as well as for the combined data in each ObsId.

3.1. Background Subtraction

Since the HEXTE background has emission line features at 67 keV due to activation of the NaI(Tl) and at the lead K-lines at 74 and 85 keV due to the collimator, one must demonstrate that any claimed line features are not due to imperfect background subtraction. The brightest background line complex is at 30 keV, with a flux of 3.85×10^{-2} photons cm^{-2}s^{-1}. The 90% upper limit to its flux in the net Cas A spectrum is 2.18×10^{-5} photons cm^{-2}s^{-1}, or 0.07% of background. The 67 and 74 keV background lines have fluxes of 1.9×10^{-2} photons cm^{-2}s^{-1} and 1.2×10^{-2} photons cm^{-2}s^{-1}, respectively. Using the percentage of background upper limit at 30 keV, we estimate the systematic sensitivity limit for the ^{44}Ti lines in this observation is 1×10^{-5} photons cm^{-2}s^{-1}.

3.2. Spectral Fitting Results

The pulse height data were binned into single, 1 keV bins to 30 keV, double width bins to 89, and quadruple width bins to 100 keV. Above that energy they were combined as 100-140, 140-180, 180-220, and 220-240 keV. Three sets of data were fitted: ObsId 10271, 20253, and their sum. The data were then fitted with a power law plus two gaussian lines at the expected energies for ^{44}Ti$\rightarrow^{44}$Sc decay (67.9 and 78.4 keV). The intensities of the two lines were linked to be the same value, and the widths of the lines were broadened by 2.5% to 1.7 and 2.0 keV respectively to account for the Cas A expansion velocity of 7500 km/s (Fesen, Becker & Goodrich 1988). The results are given in Table 2. The fit to the continuum for the two independent observations yields consistent indices and fluxes, and the best fit to the summed data is a photon index Γ=3.125±0.050 and 20-100 keV flux of $4.60\pm0.18\times10^{-11}$ ergs cm^{-2}s^{-1}keV^{-1}. Fitting the ^{44}Ti line flux in the two independent observations yielded fluxes at the -0.87σ and 1.69σ level, respectively. The best fit line flux to the combined data was $1.57\pm2.81\times10^{-5}$ photons cm^{-2}s^{-1}, which yielded a 90% confidence upper limit on the flux from each of the ^{44}Ti lines of 3.6×10^{-5} photons cm^{-2}s^{-1}. These values are consistent with those measured by BeppoSAX (Vink et al. 2001). The continuum was detected to 100 keV, thereby extending the maximum detected energy reported in Allen et al. (1997). The data plus best fit model for the combined data are shown in Figure 1.

Residuals to the best fit model in the case of the ObsId 10271 observation contain a large fluctuation ($\Delta\chi^2$= 8.4) in the bin at 70 keV. Since the 2 keV width of this bin is less than the detector resolution at that energy (10 keV), the deviation is considered a statistical fluctuation. This conclusion is supported by the residuals in the ObsId 20253 data, where the residual at that energy is significantly less ($\Delta\chi^2$= 3.3).

4. Discussion

The observed ^{44}Ti flux (Iyudin 1999; Vink et al. 2001) has very interesting implications for the mass of the progenitor, the supernova ejecta energy, and the question of whether the compact object left after the explosion was a neutron star or a black hole. Taking the best estimate of the mean COMPTEL and BeppoSAX flux in each of the ^{44}Ti lines to be $2.7\pm0.5 \times 10^{-5}$ photons/cm^2 s, we find that the ^{44}Ti yield from the Cas A supernova should be about $1.5\pm0.3 \times 10^{-4}$ M$_\odot$, assuming an age of 317 yr for a 1997 mean date of the observations, a ^{44}Ti half-life of 59.2 $\pm$ 0.6 yr, and a distance of 3.4 kpc. This can be compared with theoretical calculations of ^{44}Ti production in core collapse supernovae (Woosley & Weaver 1995; Nakamura et al. 2001).

First, we find that the ^{44}Ti yield is roughly a factor of 2 or more greater than the expected (Woosley & Weaver 1995; Nakamura et al. 2001) yields in any core collapse supernovae with ejecta energies close to $\sim1\times10^{51}$ ergs, which can explain the observed properties of most (8 to 25 M$_\odot$) Type II supernovae. However, the observed yield is consistent with that expected from supernovae of stars with initial masses greater than 25 M$_\odot$ — implied by the optical observations (Fesen & Becker 1991; Jansen et al. 1988) — if the ejecta energy was $\sim2\times10^{51}$ ergs.

The calculations of (Woosley & Weaver 1995) and (Nakamura et al. 2001) also predict that such increased ejecta energies in the supernova explosions of the more massive (>25 M$_\odot$) stars leave a neutron star remnant, instead of a black hole which would be expected from such stars if the ejecta energy were a factor of 2 lower. The calculations of Woosley & Weaver (1995), in fact, suggest that ^{44}Ti yield and the remnant mass may be strongly dependent on the ejecta energy, since at 30 M$_\odot$ their calculated yield jumps from a negligible value of 5×10^{-10} M$_\odot$ at an ejecta energy of 1.1×10^{51} ergs, to 1.4×10^{-4} M$_\odot$ at an ejecta energy of 2.0×10^{51} ergs, while the predicted mass of the remnant compact object drops from that of a black hole at 4.1 M$_\odot$ to that of a neutron star at 1.9 M$_\odot$. The calculations of Nakamura et al. (2001) for supernovae of $\geq$25 M$_\odot$ stars also suggest that $\sim2.0\times10^{51}$ ergs are required for the observed ^{44}Ti yield and that such ejecta energies will leave a remnant neutron star, rather than a black hole.

Thus, the theoretical calculations suggest that for a WN Wolf-Rayet progenitor mass $\geq$25 $M_{\odot}$, the observed ^{44}Ti yield requires an ejecta energy of $\sim 2\times10^{51}$ergs, and that such conditions produce neutron stars, rather than black holes. The observed ^{44}Ti yield would appear to rule a black hole as the point source discovered by *Chandra* (Tananbaum 1999).

Although no pulse period has yet been detected from the Cas A compact object, comparisons of the spectral index and luminosity of the *Chandra* x-ray source with those of other x-ray pulsars suggest (Chakrabarty et al. 2001; Mereghetti, Tiengo, & Israel 2001) that it looks more like an Anomalous X-ray Pulsar/Soft Gamma-ray Repeater (AXP/SGR) than a radio pulsar. We point out that another indicator for such an association is the fact that the Cas A remnant is expanding in the warm denser phase of the interstellar medium (e.g. Higdon & Lingenfelter (1980); Hatsukade & Tsunemi (1992)), which is also the site of the bulk of the AXP/SGRs (Marsden et al. 2001). The majority of the radio pulsars, on the other hand, are observed in the hot tenuous medium where most of the core-collapse supernovae occur. Fallback disk (Alpar 2001) and push-back disk (Marsden et al. 2001) models for AXP/SGRs utilize ejecta material to form a small accretion disk around a conventional neutron star (i.e., with magnetic field of 10^{10-13} Gauss), which provides the additional torque to spin-down the neutron star rapidly and the accreted matter to generate the greater X-ray luminosity seen in AXP/SGRs. Fallback disks form within a few days from material that cannot escape the newly formed neutron star, whereas push-back disks form many years later from material decelerated by the Sedov-phase reverse shock and subsequently captured by the neutron star. We suggest Cas A is possibly in the early stages of the AXP/SGR scenario in which the push-back disk has yet to form, since the reverse shock has not reached the material in the vicinity of the neutron star. This possibility is consistent with the lack of detection of a counterpart that could be associated with a disk (Kaplan, Kulkarni, & Murray 2001). Thus, one might expect the present emission to be indicative of a conventional cooling neutron star, as per Chakrabarty et al. (2001), and when the disk does form, the accretion will increase the luminosity to that of present-day AXP/SGRs and pulsed emission will commence.

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Table 1. Log of Observations

ObsId	Dates of Observations	On-Source Livetime (ks)	Background Livetime (ks)
10271	20-28 April 1997	120.0	90.0
20253	31 March - 17 April 1996	106.2	79.8
00022	20 January 1996	12.3	10.8
10418	1-2 August 1996	2.7	2.0
30804	10 March 1998	2.9	1.5
40806	23-25 March 1999	6.8	5.8
	5 August 1999		

Table 2. Best Fit Cas A Spectral Parameters

Parameter	ObsId 10271	ObsId 20253	Combined
Photon Index	3.088±0.066	3.175±0.073	3.125±0.050
Flux (20-100 keV)[a]	4.759±0.246	4.405±0.249	4.602±0.178
^{44}Ti Line Flux[b]	−1.65±1.88	7.09±4.20	1.57±2.81
90% Confidence Limit[b]	≤1.85	0.72–8.99	≤3.59
χ^2/DOF	68.0/51	34.0/51	60.8/51

[a] 10^{-11} ergs/cm^{-2}s^{-1}

[b] 10^{-5} photons/cm^{-2}s^{-1}

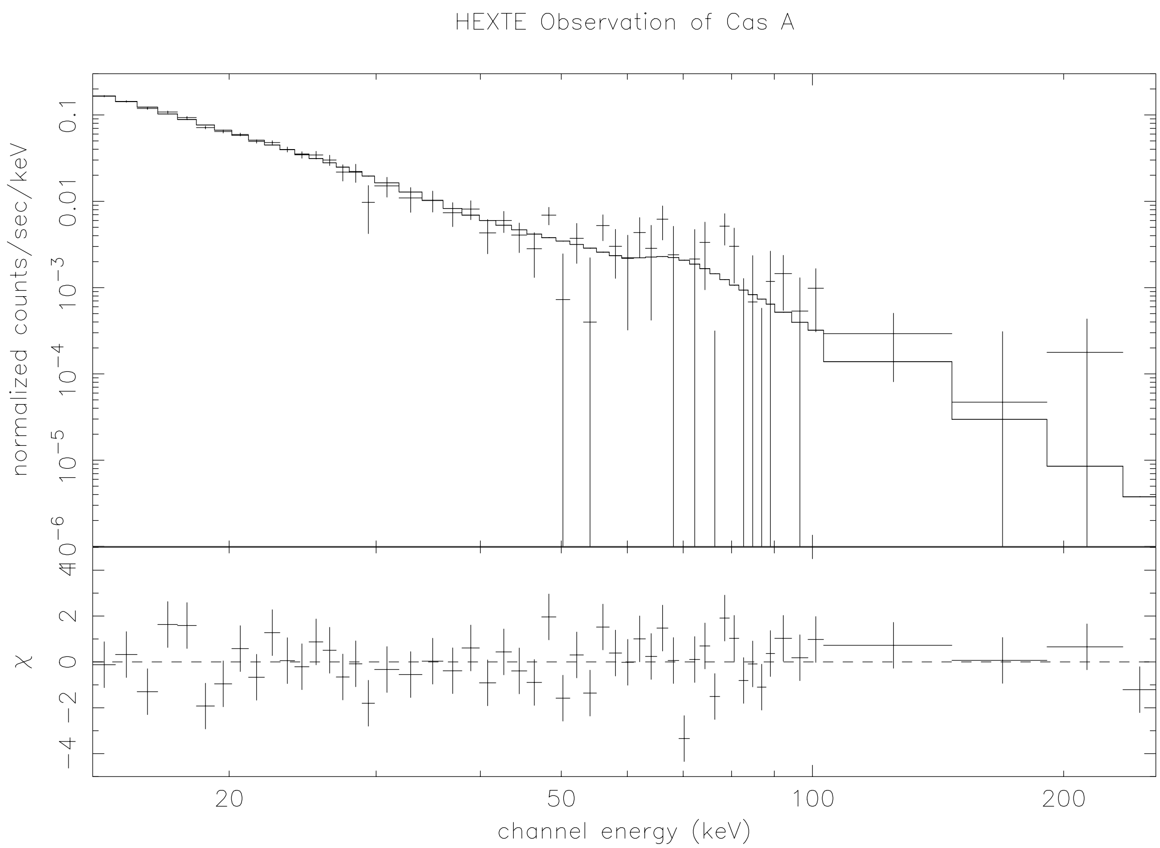

Fig. 1.— The top panel shows the counts data with 1σ error bars for the combined HEXTE observations of Cas A. Data from both HEXTE clusters have been combined and the data is binned as described in the body of this paper. The best fit model is given by the solid line. The bottom panel gives the χ value of the fit to each bin.